

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 1, 2010

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I was alarmed to learn that the St. Louis Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center may have exposed more than 1,800 veterans to a multitude of dangerous viruses. As a result of inadequate dental tool sterilization, many veterans – including my constituents – who were treated at the John Cochran Dental Clinic from February 2009 through March 2010 are at risk of contracting hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

I am certain you believe that these men and women who bravely served our country deserve better. Regardless of what steps the Department has already taken, it's clear there will continue to be a great deal of concern on the part of these veterans and their families, as well as the millions of veterans that visit and trust in the care of other VA facilities around the country.

It's critically important that the VA reassures all veterans about the quality and availability of the health care services they have earned. To that end, I would respectfully request that you respond to the following important questions regarding this situation:

- How will the Department ensure that the 1,812 at-risk individuals received and fully understand the initial notification letter?
- What kinds of specific follow-up communication does the VA plan to conduct with the recipients of the original letter that was sent this week?
- It is my understanding this issue was discovered during an inspection in mid-March. Why did it take over three months to properly notify patients?
- According to information provided by VA staff, this situation was discovered during a "routine" inspection conducted by the National Infections Diseases Program Office (IDPO). What is the schedule for this type of inspection?

- Will the VA launch a full investigation of this incident and when can Congress expect a full accounting for how this could have occurred?
- The millions of veterans who have honorably served our nation deserve the best care we can provide at the highest quality facilities. What types of safeguards have been put into place to ensure a situation like this does not occur in the future?

As a distinguished veteran yourself, you undoubtedly share my view that the health of our veterans is a very serious matter. As I have discussed with veterans groups throughout Missouri, I believe that one of our most important national responsibilities is to our veterans who have served us honorably.

I look forward to your response regarding how the VA plans to improve the care it provides in the wake of this unacceptable failure to live up to the promises made to our veterans.

Sincere regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Roy Blunt", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Roy Blunt